



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

**1420 E 6th Ave, PO Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-1267**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. Purpose of and Need for Action

1. Project Title: West Yellowstone Ski Education Foundation (WYSEF)

2. Type of Proposed Action: The proposed actions are of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Cross Country Ski Trail and Facility Development Master Plan, of November 2006 and are here summarized into four areas (See Part I, para. 10 for detailed description):

- Target Replacement and Supplementation.
- Target Installation and Protection.
- Retaining Wall and Shooting Ramp Paving.
- Safety Berm Modification.

3. Location Affected by Proposed Action: The Biathlon Range is located on USFS property on the Rendezvous Ski Trails, within 1 mile of the Town of West Yellowstone (see Map 1). The Biathlon course is part of the Rendezvous Trail System (RTS) and the South Plateau Trail (SPT) system in Sections 32 - 34 of T13S, R5E, P&BM, and Sections 3 - 5 and 8, 9 of T14S, R5E, for the RTS; and Sections 16, 17, 19 - 22, and 27 - 33 of T14S, R5E, P&BM for the SPT. The RST and the Biathlon Range is wholly within the Hebgen Lake Ranger District, Gallatin National Forest, Montana.

4. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action: MCA 87-1-276 through 87-1-279 (Legislative established policies and procedures for the establishment and improvement of shooting ranges) and MCA 87-2-105 (Departmental authority to expend funds to provide training in the safe handling and use of firearms and safe hunting practices). The Montana Legislature has authorized funding for the establishment of a Shooting Range Development Program providing financial assistance for the development of shooting ranges. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) has responsibility for the administration of the program, including the necessary guidelines and procedures governing applications for funding assistance under the program.

To be eligible for grant assistance, a private shooting club or a private organization:

- (a)(i) shall accept in its membership any person who holds or is eligible to hold a Montana hunting license and who pays club or organization membership fees;*
- (ii) may not limit the number of members;*

(iii) may charge a membership fee not greater than the per-member share of the club's or organization's reasonable cost of provision of services, including establishment, improvement, and maintenance of shooting facilities and other membership services; and
(iv) shall offer members occasional guest privileges at no cost to the member or invited guest and shall make a reasonable effort to hold a public sight-in day each September, when the general public may use the shooting range for a day-use fee or at no cost; or
(b) shall admit the general public for a reasonable day-use fee.

5. Need for the Action(s): This action is needed, since the Rendezvous Ski Trails (RST), which the Biathlon is a part, has experienced a documented significant and steady growth in winter use, and (anecdotally) steady growth in summer use. With West Yellowstone as a gateway to Yellowstone National Park, the RST has received international exposure and acclaim, providing a training site to several international cross-country ski and biathlon Olympic teams in preparation for the 2000 Winter Olympics, and gathering national attention for its early season snow accumulations and skiing opportunities. In the 6 seasons, from the 1999-2000 winters through the 2004-2005 winters, the overall number of winter visits to the trail system has grown by 64% for a total visitation of over 41,000 during the 2004-2005 winters. The existing trail systems are inadequate for the growing number of users...inadequate and, in some cases, dilapidated facilities... under-utilized recreation potential.... Non-winter visitation has not been counted, but anecdotally, has also seen significant increase. Community support for the trail system is strong, with volunteers providing literally thousands of hours of labor (USFS Cross Country Ski Trail and Facility Development Master Plan, of November 2006).

Consequently, there is a need to continue work annotated in the Cross Country Ski Trail and Facility Development Master Plan (USFS November 2006). The facility is in immediate need of long term maintenance and periodic upgrade. The work is necessary to return the current biathlon range to current standards for safety, security, and function as a Biathlon Shooting Range capable of hosting international competitions. There is also a need for a multi-use facility for pistol, archery, tactical shotgun and rifle, which would require expanding the potential of the range for use by these other user groups.

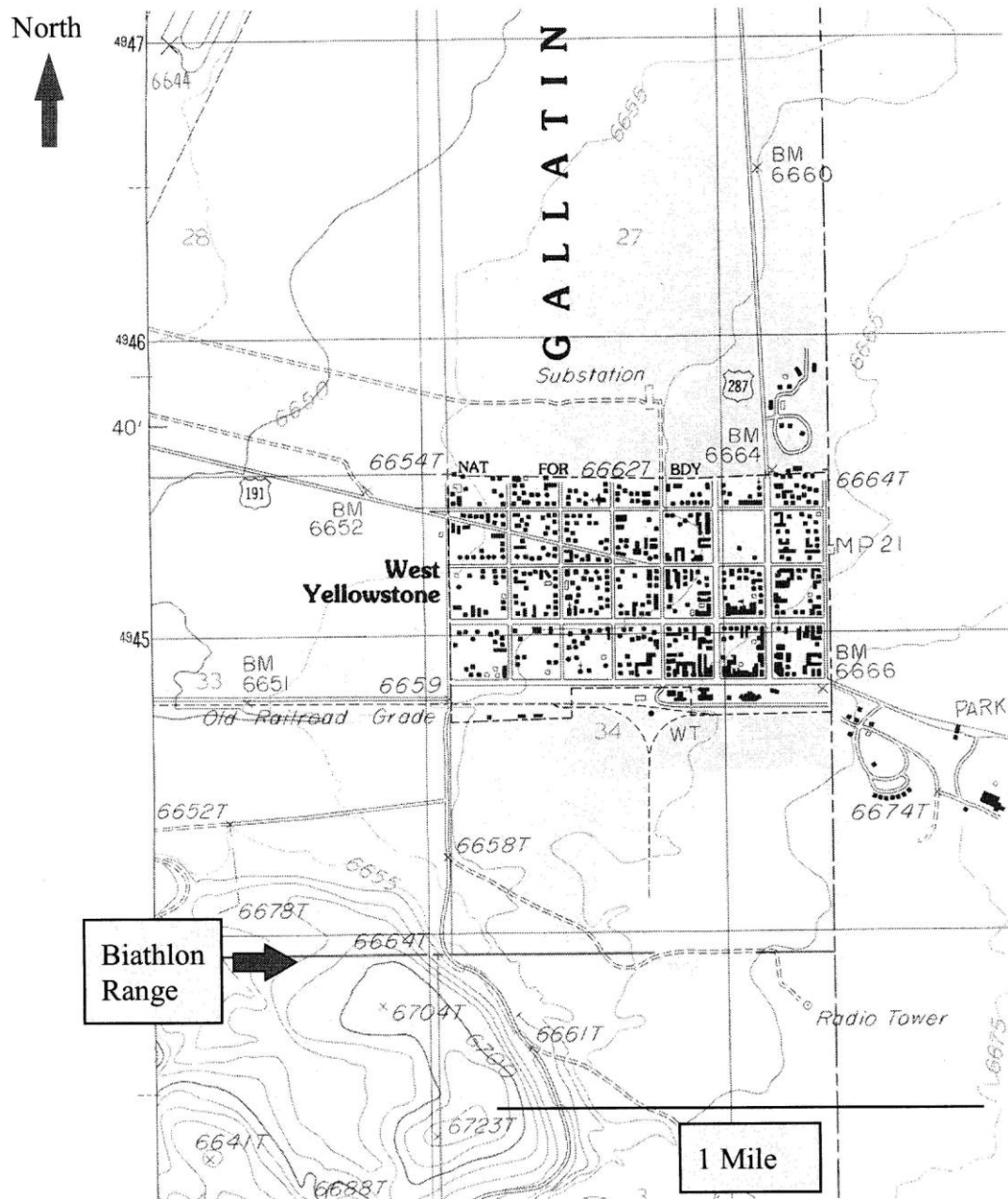
- a) There are currently 20 reactive steel Biathlon targets which are approaching 25 years old and are no longer capable of meeting international standards for precision and function.
- b) Current targets need protection from weather and vandalism.
- c) Transition at the firing line is sloped and needs improvement and protection. It also has handicapped and winter grooming accessibility.
- d) Safety berm modifications are necessary for current and future improvements.

6. Objectives for the Action(s): To complete the work in the approved USFS Cross Country Ski Trail and Facility Development Master Plan of November 2006 (USDA Forest Service, Hebgen Basin Ranger District, West Yellowstone, MT.) Diversify the potential use of the facility to other shooting disciplines and improve handicapped accessibility, while returning the range to current standards for safety, security, and function as a Biathlon Shooting Range capable of hosting international competitions.

- a) Replace and supplement targets to meet international standards
- b) Provide a roofed target mounting that also provides secure storage of target.
- c) Provide a protective retaining wall and sidewalk for handicapped accessibility, improved winter grooming, and consistent shooter surfaces.

- d) Improve safety terms to accommodate other range improvements and expansions.

7. Maps and Supporting Figures:



Map 1 – Area Map showing location of the WYSEF's Biathlon Range.

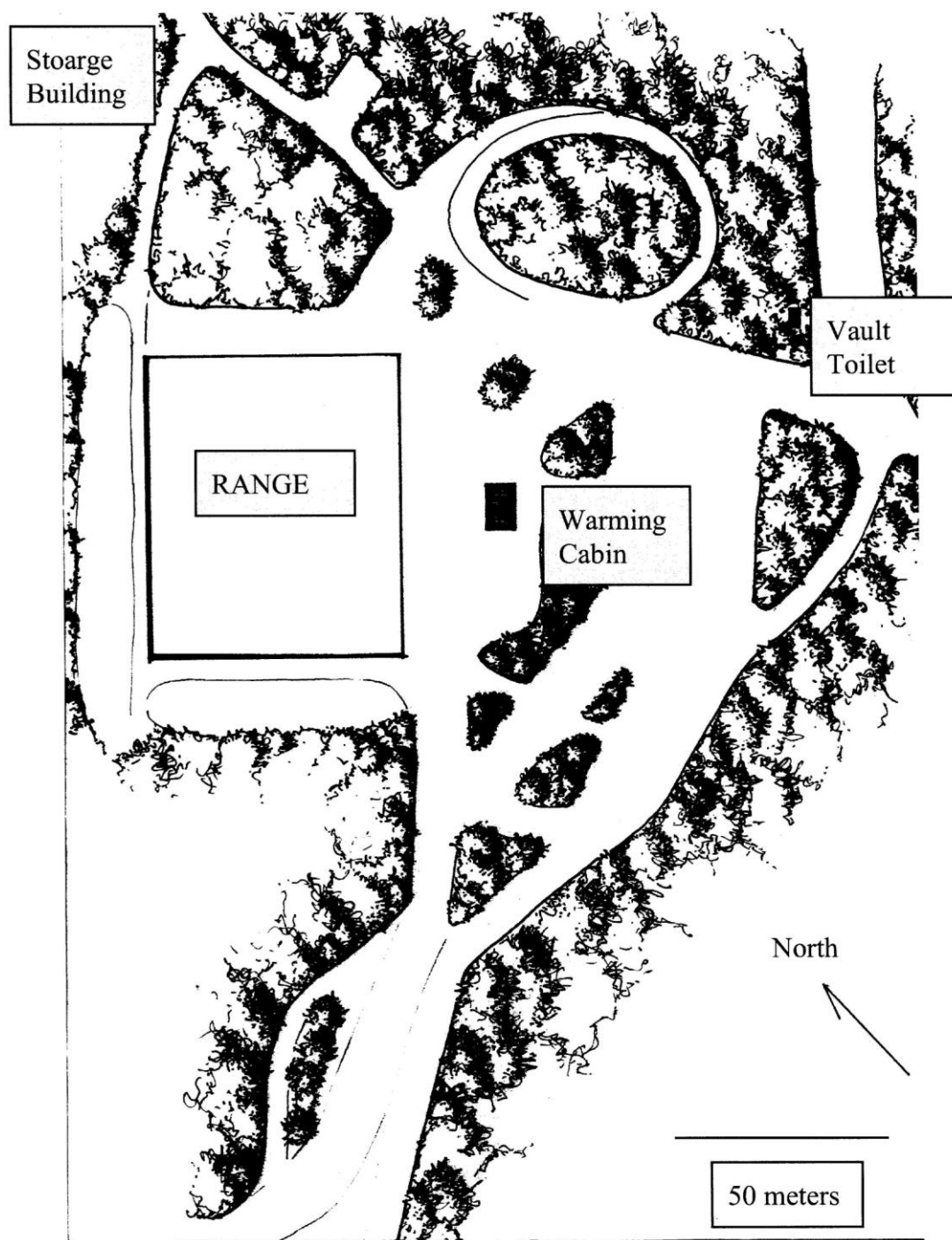


Figure 1 – Site Layout of Biathlon Range.

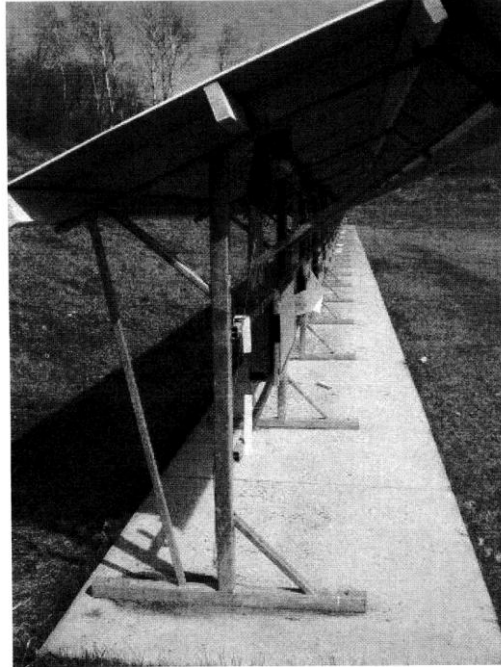


Figure 2 – Example of target installation with protective cover.

8. Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected: The proposed improvements will be within a much smaller area on the existing Biathlon Range and the RST within the Hebgen Ranger district of the Gallatin National Forest.

9. Affected Environment (A brief description of the affected area of the proposed project): The project is on the existing Biathlon Range which has been in use for +30 years. The proposed improvements will be within a much smaller area of the Biathlon Range. The following is taken from the USDA Forest Service Cross Country Ski Trail and Facility Development Plan, Decision Notice and Findings of No Significant Impact (November 2006):

The Rendezvous Trail System maintenance and development project occurs in a relatively low relief area (elevation 6650 ft to 6849ft) southwest of West Yellowstone, Montana. Geology is characterized by obsidian sands and moraines (Ramsey, 1978), with a 34-1C obsidian sand soil type. This soil type has low erosion potential, low sediment delivery efficiency, and low risk of landslides.

The project area is within the Madison River basin and is drained by two draws. The first, (West Draw) located on the West side of the project area is ephemeral and conveys stream flow only during spring runoff, northwest into the South Fork Madison River. A wetland is located near the mouth of the draw and is expected to remain wet year-round (Susan Lamont, personal communication). The second draw (East Draw) runs northeast through a portion of the Dead Dog Loop on the east side of the Rendezvous Trail system. No stream channel was observed during the project area survey, which suggests that the draw rarely conveys surface flow. With the exception of some sedge, no riparian vegetation was detected. Finally, no permanent or ephemeral pools were detected during the project area survey.

10. Description of Project: Work to be completed was approved in the Cross Country Ski Trail and Facility Development Master Plan (USFS 2006). All construction and modifications are taking place on existing facilities, except the retaining wall and portions of the sidewalk. These proposed projects will be confined to the small area of Figure 2 shown as “Range.”

- **Target Replacement and Supplementation.** There are currently 20 reactive steel Biathlon targets which are approaching 25 years old and are no longer capable of meeting international standards for precision and function. Replace all targets with the addition of two more for a total of 22 targets and post new signage concerning range use and policy.
- **Target Installation and Protection.** Construct a roofed target mounting system (see Figure 2), bullet traps, and a system of secure storage of targets when not in use.
- **Retaining Wall and Shooting Ramp Paving.** Construct a 4’ retaining wall and paved 4’ wide sidewalk for the length of the firing line/shooting ramp.
- **Safety Berm Modification.** Minor shaping and contouring of safety berms to accommodate the expansion and improvements in items a-c above.

In Accordance With (IAW) contracts agreements with Fish, Wildlife & Parks, all projects are to be completed by June 30, 2011.

11. List any Other Local, State, or Federal Agency that has Overlapping or Additional Jurisdiction:

(a) Permits, Licenses and/or Authorizations:

Agency Name	Permit
None	

Funding:

Agency Name	Funding Amount
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	\$26,325

12. Affiliations, Cooperating Agencies, User Groups and/or Supporting Groups:

The trails and associated facilities, including the Range, are administered through a unique partnership that includes the USFS, the Town of West Yellowstone, the West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce, and the WYSEF. The USFS owns the property, the Chamber of Commerce owns the targets and pays the utilities for the warming cabin and WYSEF operates events and maintains the facility. The facility is available to any individual free of charge and administered by WYSEF. Organized group use or long term use is assessed a nominal fee on a case by case basis.

13. History of the Planning and Scoping Process, and Any Public Involvement:

Proposed improvements had been discussed within the membership of the WYSEF, the Chamber of Commerce, at the West Yellowstone town council meetings and within the Hebgen Ranger District of the Gallatin National Forest. Meetings of the WYSEF, the Chamber, and the Town Council, and their minutes, are open or available to the public. The USFS completed an Environmental Assessment of the Cross-Country Ski Trail and Facility Development Master

Plan with the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) issued in November 2006. The proposals presented in this Environmental Assessment (EA) are a smaller part of that Master Plan. Public comment periods during the EA process were completed and public notice made for both the EA and the FONSI. This range proposal had also been further discussed with the associated project vendors and contractors.

14. List of Agencies Consulted/Contacted During Preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

15. Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor:

Marc Sheppard, P.O. Box 1028, West Yellowstone, MT 59758, (406) 646-9222 for the West Yellowstone Ski Education Foundation.

16. Other Pertinent Information: This proposal is part of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Cross Country Ski Trail and Facility Development Master Plan, of November 2006. This Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Environmental Assessment is tiered from the USFS National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) EA of that Master Plan. Copies of that EA and its FONSI are available at the Hebgen Ranger District, Gallatin National Forest in West Yellowstone, MT and through MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

Shooting range applications require the participant's governing body to approve by resolution its submission of applications for shooting range funding assistance. Resolution Date: April 29, 2010

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Abbreviated Checklist--The degree and intensity determines extent of Environmental Review. (An abbreviated checklist may be used for those projects that are not complex, controversial, or are not in environmental sensitive areas)

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		
3. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		
5. Water quality, quantity & distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture				X		
8. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics				X		

Comments: This project is part of the Cross-Country Ski Trail and Facility Development Master Plan which had an environmental Assessment through the USFS in 2006. The EA of the Master Plan assessed the physical, biological, social and economic environments of the affected project area and the potential changes to those environments due to the plan implementation. The one concern which the EA addressed in detail, were the “Effects on Wildlife: Threatened, Endangered, Proposed and Sensitive Species; Management Indicator Species.” There were no significant impacts found in implementation of the Master Plan and there were no negative impacts, even minor, noted for the area of this particular proposal.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				X		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational activities				X		
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution & density of population and housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

Comments The only impacts noted for items 6 and 7 were positive impacts, which increased or improved the recreational opportunities. That increased opportunity will meet the growing needs of the community, tourists coming to recreate, and for future events/competitions that would now be possible. Consequently the proposed project should positively influence not only the recreational environment, but the economic environment too.

Part III. Environmental Consequences

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur? NO

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?

This proposed action has no impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant. Cumulative impacts have been assessed considering any incremental impact of the proposed action when they are combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, and no significant impacts or substantially controversial issues were found. There are no extreme hazards created with this project and there are no conflicts with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan.

Identification of the Preferred Alternatives:

The proposed alternative A and alternative B (the no action alternative) were considered.

- **Alternative A (Proposed Alternative)** is to provide partial funding to WYFES to complete the following projects described in Part I, paragraph (section) 10 (Description of Project) to purchase and install new targets with protective covers, build a retaining wall and concrete shooting ramp, and improve safety berms.
- **Alternative B (No Action Alternative)** the grant would be denied and the area will probably remain an active biathlon range without the proposed improvements.

Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

Two alternatives have been considered, **A** (Proposed Alternative) and **B** (No Action Alternative). There were no other alternatives that were deemed reasonably available, nor prudent.

Neither the proposed alternative (**A**) nor the no action alternative (**B**) would have any significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences.

- There are beneficial consequences to acceptance of the **Proposed Alternative (A)**: improving safety and usability, increasing recreational opportunities, and increasing economic environment in the West Yellowstone area by improving and updating range facilities.
- The **No Action Alternative (B)** would be to not provide FWP funds for the proposed improvements on the Biathlon range.

Describe any Alternatives considered and eliminated from Detailed Study:

NONE

List and explain proposed mitigative measures (stipulations): NONE

Individuals or groups contributing to, or commenting on, this EA:

Marc Sheppard, P.O. Box 1028, West Yellowstone, MT 59758
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

PART IV NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

All of the pertinent or potential impacts of this proposal have been reviewed, discussed, and analyzed. No part of the proposal reviewed was complex, controversial, or located in an environmentally sensitive area. The projects being proposed are on properties owned by the USFS, and maintained by the community and the WYSEF. The low impact activities proposed, the increased recreational opportunities, and the +30 year history of the WYSEF providing safe shooting opportunities to the community and the public at large, indicates support for the proposed alternative. There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative to replace and supplement targets, to provide target protection and security, to improve the shooting line and its accessibility with a retaining wall and paved ramp, or to modifying the safety berm.

EA prepared by: GENE R. HICKMAN
(M.S. Wildlife Management)
Ecological Assessments
Helena, MT 59602

Date Completed: July 27, 2010

Approved By FWP: August 30, 2010

PART V. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

Recommendation and justification concerning preparation of EIS:

There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative; therefore, the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Describe public involvement, if any:

Announcement for EA comment will be published in the West Yellowstone News and on the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks website to allow an opportunity for public review. Additionally the EA will be available for review on the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks website. The deadline for public comment will be 5:00 pm on September 17, 2010.